

Minutes – Shields Township Board of Trustees

Regular Meeting April 21, 2022

STATE OF ILLINOIS,)
Lake County,)
Town of Shields) SS.

THE TOWN BOARD OF SHIELDS TOWNSHIP held its regular monthly meeting via Zoom and in-person April 21, 2022, at 6:30 p.m.

PRESENT Heather Kerr Supervisor-absent
 Tammy Bryan Clerk
 Jeff Urso Town Trustee
 Brady Andersen Town Trustee
 David Weil Town Trustee
 Kathryn Walker-Eich Town Trustee

- I. **Meeting Called to Order** – Trustee Weil called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Motion for Trustee Weil to chair meeting Trustee Urso, second Trustee Andersen.
- II. **Roll Call** – Supervisor Kerr absent, present in-person: Trustees Weil, Andersen, Urso and Walker-Eich, Assessor Helton
- III. **Pledge of Allegiance** – Trustee Weil opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance
- IV. **For Action** – Trustee Andersen motioned to move Trustee Reports to the end, Trustee Urso second.
- V. Motion by Trustee Weil to postpone general meeting minutes that are in contention from March 31, 2022 until May 2022, second by Trustee Andersen to move March 31, 2022 meeting minutes to May approve minutes from March 31, 2022, board meeting, 2-2 did not pass roll call vote. Trustee Urso nay and Trustee Walker-Eich abstain. Trustee Urso requested a tie-breaker, Clerk only can vote for place a new board member. Trustee Urso stated no quorum to pass the move the minutes. Trustee Urso motion to approve last month’s minutes, Trustee Weil is nay, Trustee Urso, request just move past this. Trustee Urso stated there *was a majority* that the minutes can be postponed until May 2022. Trustee Urso corrected his original statement.
- VI. **For Action** – Approve Bills
 - i. Town Fund expenses approval \$51,851.66, Trustee Andersen motioned to approve, second Trustee Weil passed a roll call vote 2-0. Trustee Urso abstain and Trustee Walker-Eich abstain.
 - ii. General assistance expenses approval \$3,360.00 Trustee Andersen motioned to approve, second Trustee Weil, passed by 2-0 on a roll call vote. Trustee Urso abstain and Trustee Walker-Eich abstain.
 - iii. Road & Bridge expenses approval \$12,560.00 Trustee Andersen, motioned to approve, second Trustee Weil, Trustee Urso abstain and Trustee Walker-Eich abstain, passed by a 2-0 on a roll call vote.
- VII. **New Business** No New Business

Assessor Report – Assessor Helton

1. Continue to work with residents to file exemptions. Currently open Tuesday and Thursday. Office will now be open five days a week starting May 1, 2022. Several times I have been in the office to help the taxpayer to file extensions and further relief that should have been granted by coming into the office. Completed our work on the pricing of additions that I talked about last month. Right now finalizing our documentation for current PTAB complaints, that is very important thing to defend the assessments we have established.

2. It has been an honor and privilege to serve as the Shields Township Assessor for the past five years, even though it is a part-time position, I have always devoted all the time necessary to work with my staff, other elected officials and the taxpayers of Lake County to develop fair and equitable values for the properties located in Shields Township. I am proud of what we have done and accomplished and believe our high level of service to the taxpayers will continue for many years to come. I want to say thank you to my staff Kelly, Andrea and Mark for your dedication to the office. And also for strong support they given me through the years. When we ran for election last year, I was so proud of each of the newly elected Shields Township Board members. They represented everything that a strong dedicated board needed to provide great service to the residents of Shields Township. The Board is very diversified and a very diversified background and I'm proud of that. We've got good people with a real estate background, business ownership and business background, banking and finance background, but more importantly, each board member wanted to work for all the residents young and old to be sure that their needs and concerns were being heard. We wanted to work with other units of local government and it and attempts to provide more cost effective and better quality of service to all residents and promised the votes that they would work together as we would work together as a team. And that was actually the name of our party, Shields Team Party. We were all going to work together as a team to accomplish these goals. However, having attended almost every meeting, every Township meeting it is very apparent this idea of the board working as a collaborative body is not taking place. Township Supervisor and my opinion has in my opinion not provided the leadership needed to allow the board to bring their ideas and concerns forward and provide the quality of service and fiscal responsibility that we promised the voters we would provide. There has been very many times when the financial questions or requests which were ignored such as Trustee Walker-Eich's, regarding the budget regarding inflation was totally ignored by the Supervisor and now five months later has become a major issue in our country. As Supervisor, she took over the role as Highway Commissioner and fortunately for me, I've got former Highway Commissioner Scott Anderson sitting next to me tonight. There was a missed opportunity to order salt through a state program and we had a chance to order it at a much lower state price through all the towns buying together, we missed that opportunity. Luckily, we had a mild winter. So that was fortunate enough. But the former Commissioner blamed for this, that's not true. The state send out, notifies, the Township's and other governmental bodies that use their salt well in advance. In the springtime there was notification when Heather became the so-called Road Commissioner and we missed the chance to get the negotiated cost and we had to buy the salt at a regular price. This could have been avoided and it's unfortunate that it wasn't, but it wasn't and just move forward. I guess, you know, after I've seen the uneasiness that's now taking place in my office because of things in the other side of the township office, even my staff is recognized that something is wrong. Therefore I would ask the Supervisor to step down from her post before May 2, 2022 to bring back serious and sincere leadership and allow our Board of Trustees to make the appropriate adjustments need to make Shields Township the effective unit of local government that everyone desires it to be.

Recognizing this sounds harsh, I truly believe is necessary due to the toxic atmosphere which currently exists in our Township.

In conclusion, should this not occur, it would my intention to tender my resignation from the positions of Shields Township Assessor as of May 2nd, 2022. Once again, it has been a pleasure and an honor to serve the taxpayers and the residents of Shields Township. I've done the best job that I could I'm proud of what I've done as the assessor, but I'm also proud of the current board which last April when we all got sworn in I thought we had a magnificent board with the different backgrounds. As I already said and I thought this was going to be a board that was really going to move forward and do great things for the residents. And it's very unfortunate a year after the start that it's not happening. And I feel very bad about that. And that's my report for the night.

VIII. **Reports**

Trustee Reports –

Trustee Andersen statement - I decided to enter the election to become a Trustee of Shields Township because of an obligation to be of service. I ran on a slate with everyone currently serving, but I feel there is a level of frustration by many among us and honestly believe, as much as it pains me to say this, a change in leadership may be the only solution. I do not plan to resign my position as I made a pledge to serve Shields Township for the duration of my term. But, we may very well lose some of our trustees, and that is for them to decide individually. However, Shields Township cannot afford to lose our most valued township asset. Assessor Helton has done an incredible job for the residents of Shields Township and as a Trustee I feel compelled to say we need to do everything possible to retain him. Thank you.

Trustee Urso statement – I joined this board because I am proud of the work I had done with the previous Supervisor Terry Darraugh during covid, Phoenix Rising closed their doors, and we were able to do an off-site food pantry. Supervisor Darraugh setup a system with me helping feed 65 food dependent families in the township. I was eager to join the board because I wanted to be sure that we can continue to work on Ga including the food pantry moving forward and make sure it never shuts its doors again. I've been on this board since 2020, I originally filled the vacancy left by then Trustee Kerr, and although there was disagreement, sometimes unpleasant, it was a civil board and we held our fiduciary responsibility and providing the best services we could for the taxpayer. Then after that board was complete, we ran as a slate. This board currently ran on the premise of a united front. Everyone here had goals and aspirations how they could help the township and its citizens. However, it is crystal clear that is not the case of the Shields Township office and its leadership fighting, inability to work together, sabotage, lack of respect and most importantly failure to provide taxpayers with the best resolutions and failing their fiduciary responsibilities. These issues are not only continuing on a monthly basis, but they keep getting intensified every month under this leadership I cannot continue. I will not be part of something that hurts others instead of helping. This office has failed the taxpayers and I will not be part of it. It is my intent to resign from this board effective at the end of business day May 2, 2022. I wish the people of Shields Township the best and the governing parties much success in delivering services to the community I love.

Trustee Walker-Eich statement – According to the United States Census Bureau, when older Americans month was established in 1963, only 17 million living Americans had reached their 65th birthday. About a third of older Americans lived in poverty and there were few programs to meet their needs. Interest in older Americans and their concerns were growing. A meeting in April 1963 between President John F. Kennedy and members of the National Council of Senior Citizens designated May as ‘Senior Citizens Month’, a prelude to Older Americans Month’.

As of 2020, again, according to the United States Census Bureau, there are 36,664 residents in Shields Township living together in a 17.8 square mile area. The median age in our township is 25.8 years and 13% of our population in Shields is 65 years or older. On a percentage basis (not in absolute numbers), this compares slightly less than the 14% for all of Lake County and 16% for all of the State of Illinois. Now what matters to me most is what I am about to report. And that is in Shields Township 4% or the 1,467 of the 36,664 residents are 80 years or older. And while there is an overlap in the data, 9% of the Shields residents are widows. That means there are 3,300 women, not necessarily seniors, and some of whom are counted in the age 80 and older number, I just mentioned, living among us all right now.

Last May, I sat down with Supervisor Kerr, to discuss the three areas of focus that I was hoping to accomplish during my four years as a newly elected Shields Township Trustee. The first vision we discussed was my goal of building an informal network to help seniors who were no longer able to drive, gain access to transportation to and from events such as senior center visits, cultural activities and parks and recreational amenities that we provide in Shields Township. The vision was for a mobility support system possibly articulated by word of mouth and social media. One that would not duplicate services already provided to Shields residents by PACE bus service, but an informal provision for seniors who, while in need of transportation, might for whatever reason, not necessarily call upon the PACE system. My mother would not call a PACE bus if she lived here, but she is in always in of mobility help. September, I took the morning off from work and visited with the two best practicing Illinois township senior services directors and returned home to share the good news. I am sad that as Older American’s Month arrives next week, we have zero to show for ground I broke for the Shields Seniors, and sadly, I would have been content with simply a groupwide discussion on where such services might fit in with this Board’s four year plan. But that wasn’t going to happen as much as I asked.

By early autumn, I had us in front of the Roads Commissioner for Lake County’s largest township, Warren. With 82 miles of roads under her supervision and this Board charged with the oversight of the nearly \$600,000 roads budget. I felt that Shields would benefit handsomely from whatever the meeting yielded. The five pages of handwritten notes I took during that extremely beneficial Saturday morning visit translated to a \$12,000 savings to the Shields taxpayers, an explanation of which is beyond today’s scope.

The meeting I arranged for Supervisor Kerr and myself with the Lake Forest and Libertyville Fire Chiefs was also a success. We had Trustee Andersen and Assessor Helton join us, and much was accomplished for this well-intended bridge builder, which I felt was important given following: the closing a few years ago of the Knollwood Volunteer Fire Department, located within close proximity to our own township offices, and given the role, we, the Board of Trustees have, overseeing the equitable delivery of property tax assessments under the excellence of Assessor Scott Helton. We have to get involved in this type of thing. That was a very and continues to be from what I understand is a controversial topic and on many, many levels and we needed to have that meeting and it went well.

Business Leadership is not a popularity contest, and while some of the best companies are run by what many would describe as dictators, to survive, dictators must let the light shine every day and when possible from all angles.

Listening very carefully to their employees is required, perhaps even the number one requirement. And this is done with full attention to that which is best for all stakeholders, including employees, township trustees and certainly the taxpayers. When tough decisions color the day, enlightened leaders consider everything. They invert. They look at how low occurrence and high consequence matters, they look at them seven ways to Sunday. They also take responsibility when things go wrong. People love to follow strong leaders. They want to be led by people with vision, conviction and good values. They may not agree with everything the leader decides, but as long as ethical lines are not being crossed, I want to repeat that, as long as ethical lines are not being crossed, employees will follow directions and trustees will not take issue with leadership. The velvet hammer, for instance, is always best when a sincere apology is in order. That is enlightened leadership.

Autocratic leadership, on the other hand, only works until it doesn't work. And then everything goes wrong, entire organizations collapse.

As the end of our first year together draws to a close, it is clear to me that sticking around to be muted and marginalized will make it impossible for me to perform my fiduciary duties accord to my conscience. As a retired banker and current business leader doing commercial property appraisals, I'm certainly in a position to help out. It wrecked me to have support under pressure the approval of a levy under a looming deadline without any prior budget meeting to inform the levy decision making. The structure of the levy's underlying budget was lazily flat lined to a prior period and there was no allocation for inflation or other contingency.

I joined Shield's Township Board because of the respect I had and continue to have for the various community members who invited me to join their slate, including Assessor Helton, whose accomplishments I am most delighted with, both as a trustee and I say that from my professional background as a real estate valuation person.

On May Day a year ago, I wanted to set out to meet the 1,467 Shields Township Senior Residents and the 3,300 widows during our first term together, I know it's lofty, and there's overlap in my number. But, that was all yesterday, which is over. Please be advised of my intent to resign from my volunteer trustee position on the Shields Township Board at the close of business on May 2. I thank you all for the interest you have expressed in the work I was able to accomplish for our friends and neighbors in Lake Forest, Lake Bluff and North Chicago. I also thank you for the respect you have shown me over the course of our short time together.

Trustee Weil statement – Let me just offer my perspective. I have had a good experience as this is my first time in an elected position and I do believe in team unity. In my experience with Supervisor Kerr actually has been very positive. She has shown up on events in North Chicago that lots of people, you know, really necessarily aren't going to show up to. So there was a kid's costume event around Halloween and she showed up to be one of the judges. There's been three or four occasions like that, where I know she's very busy and lots of things going on, but she showed up and she cared. I've always gotten my packet my board packet on time with enough time to review bills and things like that. I'm often reminded when I forget with an email to please contact Sarah and sit down with her. And so I've appreciated all of that. I walk into the office and she wants to give me a hug and welcome me. I have, and then I feel like the board meetings that have been run and trustee meetings that I have been involved in, they've all been very done, have been done professionally. We move through the agenda, it's done well, there's certainly opportunities to speak up if I wish to do that. So I guess I'm seeing a different perspective. And I have had a very positive experience in working with Shields Township. I grew up on the North Shore, I'm now living in North Chicago and I feel like I'm trying to bridge these two worlds. But I do feel it's not an easy thing to do with

Supervisor Kerr's trying to do, but my personal opinion is she's doing a very good job and she's very knowledgeable as it relates to her role.

Highway/Field Manager – no report

Clerk – not available as it is not listed on the meeting agenda

Supervisor – No report

IX. Public comments – 3 registered

Resident Dan Rogers – Good evening, I am here tonight as I am indirectly responsible for the assembly of this board. Supervisor Kerr, I cannot tell you how disappointed I am and it pains me. Over the past months, the discussions I have had with elected officials of the township about the chaos and lack of professionalism with the office are mind boggling. You staff screens phone calls, has random office hours, cancelled meeting including the last meeting. I was told was cancelled and then hours later I saw you at the Genesee Theater at the Bill O'Reilly concert. I have heard threatening lawsuits against trustees, complaints filed with the attorney general and petty battles and feuds like you were in grade school. It is curious that tonight the board can make it to the meeting room and you cannot. All of these issues are a result of terrible leadership which unfortunately poisoned the workplace and the public service you are tasked to accomplish on behalf of the residents of Shields Township. I clearly remember talking to you and other board members about what this job was and the commitment required to serve. This job is clearly not what you are cut out for. I served as a trustee for four years and Highway Commissioner for four years. I had many, many disagreements with the Supervisor and the board in both positions. However, we discussed our differences civilly and at the end of the day we had a better outcome with a collaborative effort than a fiefdom as it is apparent you are attempting to run. I know three of the four trustees personally. Jeff Urso who is a successful businessman and restaurateur. Brady Andersen, a successful real estate professional, and Kathryn Walker, a professional in the business and banking. The luxury of having these three professionals on your board could have made you an instant success. Add in Tammy Bryan who clerked for me on the Fire Commission, she is simply a rock star. Round it out with one of the most highly regarding Township Assessors in Lake County Scott Helton, you have a team who if you would have let them help you, you would have made you a huge success. Instead, all that has been accomplished in the first year is threats of lawsuits, petty fights and hatred. I ask you Madam Supervisor to resign your post prior to May 2 in order to allow this incredible group of local professionals to seek out real leadership and cure the myriad of issues that have behest the Board as a result of your actions and mismanagement and to set the township back on task for the benefit of the public. If this group indeed resigns and I am given the opportunity to speak with the press, I assure you, I will empty my locker of everything I know. I hope they also speak to the press in detail about all of your actions. I am so sad to read this tonight, I would like this added into tonight's minutes, thank you very much.

Resident Tammy Bryan – This evening I tender my resignation as the Shield's Township Clerk as of May 31. The date given May 31so the township can find a new clerk by then and not leave them hanging. Thank you.

Resident Matt Garrity – Hello Everybody, I was a previous Township Trustee and had the pleasure of working with Trustee Urso and Assessor Helton, I did not know Trustee Walker-Eich or Trustee Weil or Trustee Andersen,

but what I can tell is that obviously, there's something very wrong going on right now. It's an embarrassment to the township this is happening. It's an embarrassment to the people who have put the time in before to make sure that there was a successful transition. I can tell you from my experience that you guys losing Scott Helton is probably the worst thing to ever happen. This office, you go and talk to the other assessors, they essentially used him as a role model to look up to ask questions and it's just quite frankly terrible for the township and I hope you guys can work out your issues. But there needs to be something that gets done and it's terrible to see. Thank you.

Resident Jim Karr - Jim Karr of 535 Basil Road, a Knollwood resident of 17 years and attending Shields Township meetings for nine years. So I'd like to share some comments with all of you. Clinically, first and foremost, David, Thank you for the kind remarks of the Supervisor. I know firsthand, you know, how hard the Supervisor works being her husband. In almost 10 years of participating in Township meetings, I've never seen a level of dysfunction by the current trustees with the exception of you Mr. Weil, the trustees resigning might want to take that path. On the assessor's report I found the commentary on your report laughable coming from an assessor who goes to office, reality is that the Supervisor's office handles the calls for your office and the office is either empty or not answering the calls. So I hear that at the end of the day, you said, by the way, the assessor's office has nothing to do with Road and Bridge. So the purchase of salt is moot, that it doesn't even involve your office so I would strike that from the record to the trustees comment about the Phoenix Rising Food Pantry, etc., that has nothing to deal with Shields Township as well. So good luck with your resignation and maybe stick to your full-time business. To the trustees rambling comment about Services for seniors roads and other townships, those long-winded comments got clouded by your lack of knowledge on the township business. I would recommend sticking with banking. Maybe that resignation. Maybe that would be a good move for you. Additionally, my recommendations to the trustees who have accurately summarized many things, talk about collusion, right, the word moving on, last two more points to Mister Rogers comments, I'm sure I'll see you around town. But I would have expected nothing less from you, all lies. I'd stick to mowing, your mowing business and great acting by the way, that was really good. To set the record straight, threats of lawsuits were inspired by a trustee. So I think you can all do your own research there. And last but not least my recommendations for the Press are as follows: Please contact the Supervisor directly, she's in her office, her door is open and she'd be willing to share the truth with you, including the option to FOIA all of the emails that have been sent to the trustees that haven't been reviewed as well as the incompetent behavior completed by various trustees. So, I'd like all of that to go on the record and good luck and good luck with your resignations. Thank you.

Trustee Weil's closing statement – This has been a hard meeting. I can tell you the benefits of living in a nation like this is a freedom to speak, we've experienced that this evening. And my hope is that through all of this we will be able to navigate and create a better future. You know, it's kind of hard to know exactly what to say, given everything that has been said, but at this point, we conclude our meeting.

- X. **Adjournment** – The meeting was adjourned at 7:21 p.m. by Trustee Weil. Motion to adjourn Trustee Urso second Trustee Walker-Eich, roll call vote 4-0 to adjourn.